

This Week in Congress

April 14, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Farm Bill Conference Committee Holds First Meeting

After being appointed to the farm bill conference committee this week, I participated in the first conference committee meeting on Thursday. The conference committee is made of up agricultural leaders from the House and Senate and has the task of working out the differences between the two versions of the farm bill passed by the House and Senate. The 2002 Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2007. Since that time, Congress has passed two short-term extensions of the 2002 bill, the latest of which is set to expire on Friday, April 18.

One of the issues being considered by the farm bill conference committee is a reduction of federal funding to the federal crop insurance program. Among the funding reductions are budgetary timing shifts. Included in the budgetary timing shifts proposed by some members of the conference committee is a provision that would cause the billing date of crop insurance premiums to occur on August 15 rather than October 1. This would cause Kansas farmers to pay crop insurance premiums for fall crops prior to harvest. I am concerned this will cause farmers to seek additional operating capital not currently needed under the crop insurance program and increase interest expenses during the crop year. Those who propose this change, however, view it as a way to use the savings to increase funding for other programs such as conservation. I welcome your input on this proposal. [Click here](#) to email me your thoughts.

This process has been delayed for far too long. There is a substantial amount of work to be done to reach an agreement and little time to accomplish that goal. Increasingly, there is pressure to cut programs that are essential to Kansas producers. This bill has been heavily influenced by people and groups with interests outside rural America. My focus will continue to be keeping the emphasis where it belongs - on our nation's farmers and ranchers. We must ensure a strong safety net for producers. [Click here](#) to view photos from the first conference committee meeting.

Combat Tours Shortened, General Petraeus Updates Congress

President Bush announced on Thursday that U.S. soldiers' combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan will be shortened from 15 months to 12 months for troops leaving for combat after August 1, 2008. This is welcome news for many Kansas families that have husbands, wives,

sons, daughters, mothers and fathers serving in our military. We have asked much from our soldiers and their families and they need and deserve time at home to rest and recuperate. Numerous studies point to the tremendous physical and emotional costs of repeated and lengthy deployments. This is the right decision for the health of our troops and their families and the strength of our military.

Also this week, General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker appeared before congressional committees to provide an update on the military and political situation in Iraq. The surge has resulted in some progress and General Petraeus will continue with the planned drawdown of 20,000 U.S. forces during the summer, at which point he will evaluate whether more troops can be sent home.

Bringing Attention to World Food Aid Needs

This week, I chaired a House Hunger Caucus briefing held to discuss food aid needs. With record commodity prices, our country's efforts to feed the starving around the world have become more difficult. Earlier this month, I led a group of Members of Congress in asking President Bush to use the reserve of grain saved for unforeseen crises in order to avoid cutting the rations of refugees and others experiencing famine. [Click here](#) to see photos from the briefing.

Learning About Flight Delays

On Wednesday, I attended a Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation hearing about airline delays and other consumer issues. A record 769 million people flew on U.S. airlines both domestically and internationally last year. Unfortunately, the first eight months of 2007 were the worst ever for airline delays. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) estimates the amount of passengers will only increase, with more than one billion flying by 2021. The FAA also predicts that without significant changes to our current aviation system, delays will increase 62 percent by 2014. The Committee heard from FAA witnesses that detailed plans to help alleviate the potential of airlines delays. Witnesses from the airlines also talked about their plans to help decrease delays.

Sponsoring Resolution Honoring the University of Kansas Basketball Team

Many Kansans had reason to celebrate Monday night when the University of Kansas men's basketball team won the 2008 NCAA basketball championship. This week, I sponsored legislation honoring the team for this outstanding accomplishment. In addition to winning the national title, the Jayhawks also captured a school record 37 wins this season and many players received special honors. The championship is the school's fifth national title and the first since 1988.

The resolution was sponsored by the Kansas delegation and congratulates and commends the team for its success this season. University of Kansas athletes, coaches, students, alumni, faculty and fans have much to be proud of. The success of the basketball team was a favorite

topic of conversation at the annual Rock Chalk Ball fundraiser for the KU Alumni Association that I attended on Saturday. I congratulate Coach Bill Self and the Jayhawks on this impressive achievement.

Breaking Ground at Cloud County Wind Farm

I joined state and local leaders just south of Concordia on Friday to break ground on what will be Kansas' largest wind farm. The 201-megawatt Meridian Way Wind Farm will supply clean power to thousands of Kansans and will create new jobs and economic opportunity. Cloud County Community College has established a program to train technicians and will work with the wind farm's developer, Horizon Wind Energy, on the project. Thanks to Westar Energy, Empire District Electric Company and Horizon Wind Energy for the opportunity to join them at this event.

Wind power is an important part of the solution to our country's energy needs. To increase the use of wind power and other renewable sources of energy, we need to set aggressive goals. I am a strong supporter of the 25x'25 initiative, which challenges the U.S. to obtain 25 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2025. I am also a sponsor of legislation that provides incentives for the development of wind and solar energy.

Opening New Vet Center in Manhattan

On Tuesday, I attended the grand opening of the Manhattan Vet Center, which will provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to military veterans and their families. The Manhattan Vet Center is operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and is the second center to open in Kansas.

I joined Regional Manager Clarence Slaughter and Shawn Martin, who will be in charge of the Vet Center, as well as many active military service members and veterans at the ceremony. Taking care of our veterans is one of my top priorities in Congress. We cannot thank our service members and their families enough for the sacrifices they make. I am pleased the VA has taken this positive step toward providing better care for Kansas veterans.

Discussing Faith and Values with Top Student Leaders

This weekend, I spoke to about 50 college student leaders from across the country about faith and values in regard to leadership. This annual event in Kansas City is a follow-up to the National Student Leadership Forum on Faith and Values held each fall in Washington, D.C. These students represent the top leaders in our colleges and universities. There were eight Kansans participating in the event. It was a pleasure visiting with these student leaders. Thank you to Tracey Mann, a former intern in my office from Quinter, for the invitation.

In the Office

Donna Bales of Wichita, Julie Pinkerton of Dodge City and Sandy Kuhlman of Phillipsburg were in with the Kansas Hospice and Palliative Care Organization to talk about Medicare payments for hospice care. Dr. William Clifford of Garden City and Dr. Susan Moser of Manhattan were in with the American Academy of Ophthalmology to advocate for changes to the formula Medicare uses to reimburse physicians. Dr. David Laha of Overland Park and Dr. James Reeves of Lawrence were in to discuss foot care and Medicaid coverage of podiatric care.

Members of the Kansas Hospital Association were in to talk about the challenges of operating public hospitals, rural health care priorities and the need to prevent Medicare payment cuts to physicians. In with the group were Tom Bell and Steve Poage of Topeka; David Bradley of Junction City; Bob Mullen and Terry David of Lyons; Vicki Hahn of Leoti; Jackie and Roger John of Phillipsburg; John Kuhn and Terry Lambert of Emporia; Charlie Grimwood, Michael Terry and Cheryl Mason of Salina; Randy Peterson of Wichita; Mark Miller of Abilene and Mary Sweet of Greensburg.

Linda Williams of Lyons, Julie Roth of Roeland Park and Peggy Marlar of Emporia were in with the American Health Information Management Association to discuss the importance of privacy in electronic health records and the need to update medical codes. Gary Brunk and Bruce Linhos of Topeka were in with the Pew Charitable Trust to talk about the need to support kinship care in the foster care system. Alan MacDonald of Olathe was in with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association to discuss staffing issues at the Federal Aviation Administration.

Tim Stevenson and J. Mark Slater of Kansas City, Walter Berry of Wichita and Steve Meadows of Olathe were in with Berry Companies, Inc. to talk about the need to invest in our highway infrastructure and eliminate the estate tax. Dr. Laurie White of Dodge City, Dr. Mike Hattan of Hays, Dr. Mike Malone and Dr. Todd Fleischer of Topeka and Dr. Nathan Klutz of Manhattan were in with the Kansas Optometric Association to tell me about legislation affecting optometrists. Jane Conroy of Emporia was in with the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners to discuss funding education programs and the need to provide greater access to primary care services. Dr. Chuck Rice and Dr. Ken Odde of Manhattan were in with the Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions to express the importance of competitive grants to the agricultural research done in Kansas. Larry Dreiling of Hays and Ron Pomeroy of Belle Plain also stopped by to visit.

Several Kansans came to my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building. Among the visitors were Sue Pingleton of Shawnee Mission, Elaine Reed of Solomon, Janet Peterson of Great Bend, Gladys Johnson of Ellis and Thomas and Evelyn Clements of Eskridge. Also in were Wayne, Elaine and Jessica Theel of Emporia and Jason, Rachel, Kyra, Karsten and Amara Mohn of Salina.